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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001331

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP AUGUST 6

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE DAWN M. LIBERI; REASON: 1.5 (B) and (D).

1. (U) THIS PERIODIC JOINT POLITICAL REPORT FROM ABUJA INCLUDES:

--Obasanjo Chooses Special Advisors  
--Obasanjo Submits List of Ministers  
--Electoral Conference ) INEC Admits Problems  
--Opposition Book Launch  
--Court Case on the Presidential Election  
--Probe of Inspector General of Police  
--New AD Chairman

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Obasanjo Chooses Special Advisors  
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2. (C) President Obasanjo has chosen thirteen Special Advisors, many of which are former Ministers in the previous Obasanjo Administration. Obasanjo retained National Security Advisor Lt. General Aliyu Mohammed-Gusau and Dr. Rilwanu Lukman as his Special Advisor for Petroleum and Energy. NSA Mohammed is an ally of former Head of State Babangida and had not been in Obasanjo,s good graces because of his divided loyalties. However, Obasanjo kept Mohammed despite the latter,s attempt to resign months ago. Obasanjo probably figured out it was better to hold Mohammed near than let him go because Mohammed knows many of the weaknesses in the Presidency that Obasanjo would rather not see come to light or be exploited. Additionally, Mohammed,s and Babangida,s ambitions for 2007 now collide with Vice President Atiku. Retaining Mohammed may be seen as a way to help check Atiku,s desires. Dr. Lukman is a highly respected face in the international oil community and his retention serves to satisfy this important constituency that Nigeria will remain a consistent team player in OPEC. Obasanjo selected PDP Chairman Audu Ogbeh as his Advisor on Agriculture. Ogbeh also will remain the party,s chairman. Obasanjo also selected recently ousted Alliance for Democracy Chairman Alhaji Ahmed Abdulkadir as Advisor on Manufacturing and the Private Sector. Obasanjo selected ANPP presidential aspirant Chief Rochas Okorocha as his advisor on Inter-Party Affairs.

3. (C) Obasanjo also selected several ministers from his pervious cabinet as advisors, including: Jerry Gana (Minister of Information and National Orientation) as Advisor on Politics; Ojo Maduekwe (Minister of Transportation) as Advisor on Constitutional and Legal Matters; Kanu Agabi (Attorney General) as Advisor on Ethics and Good Governance; Mallam Lawal Batagarawa (Minister of State for Defense) as Advisor on Non-Party Relations; Mohammed Abba Gana (Minister of the FCT) as Advisor on Relations with Civil Society. (COMMENT: The naming of so many former ministers poses an interesting question that can only be answered as time unfolds. Is Obasanjo trying to strengthen his covey of advisors in order to run the government from the Presidency or are these sinecures, political favors for past services? END COMMENT)

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Obasanjo Submits List of Ministers  
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4. (C) Obasanjo submitted his list of 40 names for ministerial positions to the National Assembly (bios sent septel). In an unorthodox twist, Obasanjo did not assign any portfolios when he submitted the roster for National Assembly confirmation. This undermined the confirmation process by forcing the Assembly to screen applicants based on their general merits and not specific technical expertise or experience. Additionally undermining the process was the practice that nominees who were former Senators were basically not questioned, due to senatorial etiquette and custom. Several of the forty were senators at some point in their political careers.

5. (C) Diminishing the important legislative oversight of the

executive, Obasanjo,s tack in not identifying the portfolios indicates his continued disregard for the Assembly. It also deprives the nominations of full meaning by treating the nominees as if they were interchangeable parts, it makes them seem less important. The President has been quoted several times in the press that loyalty is the best attribute of a minister. Such statements only add to the impression that Obasanjo basically views his cabinet as administrators to follow his orders and less as advisors and equals who will help shape his policies.

16. (C) The federal constitution mandates that there must be a minimum of 36 ministers representing each of the 36 states. Of the 40 candidates put forth all but one have been approved by the National Assembly, with one name dropped from the list. The Assembly rejected former Minister of Education Babalola Borishade, and Obasanjo has since resubmitted the name, stating that the Senate did not give a reason for the dismissal. Obasanjo dropped Adewale Oladipo, who had been linked to the murder of former Attorney General Ige, from the list without explanation.

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Electoral Conference ) INEC Admits Problems  
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17. (U) At the opening of a post-election review conference held in Kaduna for three days this week, INEC Chairman Abel Guobadia admitted to serious flaws in this year,s elections, but stated that the elections overall were credible. Showing that bitterness over the elections has not receded, the major opposition parties, including the ANPP and APGA, boycotted the seminar. Guobadia accepted the constructive criticism of various international and domestic observer groups. (NOTE: This is a reversal of his stance immediately after the elections. END NOTE) While his admission of flaws was seen as an honest, but late acknowledgement, Guobadia,s claim that INEC improved between the National Assembly elections on April 12 and the Presidential and Gubernatorial elections on April 19 found few supporters inside or outside the conference. The conference was intended to explore methods of improving future elections, including the revision of the electoral law.

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Opposition Book Launch  
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18. (C) The Conference of Nigerian Political Parties, a grouping of opposition parties including the ANPP and APGA, held a book launching on July 29. The three books released are "Stolen Mandate," "The Madness Called Election 2003," and "Buhari Goes to Court." In attendance were ANPP presidential candidate Mohammedu Buhari, his running mate, Chuba Okadigbo, the APGA National Chairman, CNPP Chairman Balarabe Musa, and others from various opposition parties. They contended that the continuing Anambra crisis is not only a testimony that elections did not hold in the Southeast, but also that it marks "the beginning of the end of PDP government."

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Court Case on the Presidential Election  
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19. (U) The Federal Court of Appeal ) -- the court of first instance for a petition against the presidential election ) -- rejected the Presidency,s motion to dismiss Buhari,s suit against the April 19 presidential election. With the motion to dismiss out of the way, the case is one step closer to a hearing on the substantive merits of the case, that Obasanjo,s victory was due to electoral malpractice. Substantive arguments begin this week.

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Probe of Inspector General of Police  
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110. (C) Inspector General Tafa Balogun has come increasingly under fire in the last several weeks since the temporary abduction of Anambra State Governor Chris Ngige. As the reverberations from Ngige,s ordeal continue to hold the country,s attention, Obasanjo has ordered a probe, including any role played by Balogun. Unlike other various allegations of police corruption or involvement in official misconduct, this probe will be by the State Security Service. Balogun will have no control over any aspect of the investigation, an indication that Obasanjo may be preparing to cut him loose. The timing is especially bad for Balogun who is also defending against allegations that he collected N35 million

from Delta Governor James Ibori to cover up a previous criminal conviction, something that would have barred him from the gubernatorial seat.

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New AD Chairman  
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11. (U) The National Executive Committee of the AD on July 22 removed Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed as National Chairman. Former Osun State Governor, Chief Bisi Akande, is the new chairman, and will remain in charge until the party can hold a national convention in September. This step follows on Abdulkadir's acceptance of the post of Special Advisor on Manufacturing and the Private Sector. Abdulkadir had drawn ire from within the party for being too close to Obasanjo prior to the elections and accepting defeat too easily, when the party lost five of six state governors. In response, Abdulkadir has stated that he has not resigned from the AD, and says he cannot be removed without a national conference.  
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